

## **Statement at the 24<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN Human Rights Council**

12 September 2013

### **Annual Discussion of Gender Integration: Supporting and Protecting Women Human Rights Defenders**

Mr President,

Understanding how gender informs the experience of claiming and defending human rights is crucial to their effective promotion and protection. The integration of a gender perspective into Council functioning is key to ensuring effective responses to human rights challenges. ISHR welcomes this discussion on how civil society contributes to this integration.

Women human rights defenders frequently highlight and challenge gender inequalities. They bring to the Council and its mechanisms human rights concerns that have traditionally been marginalized. This has resulted in the Council increasingly considering gender in its responses. However, women defenders can be targeted because of their gender as well as the nature of their human rights work, in attacks which are frequently gender specific or have a gendered consequence. The frequent impunity around these violations enables gender discrimination and violence to continue.

The Council has acknowledged the protection needs of women defenders in Special Rapporteur reports, panel discussions and in resolutions on issues such as violence against women. However, Council action to protect women defenders starts with ensuring they, and all civil society actors, can contribute to this Council's work without fearing reprisals.

Judge Alfiumi of Venezuela was imprisoned in 2009 after applying a recommendation made by a UN Special Procedure. She was sexually assaulted whilst in detention. The violations against Judge Alfiumi have been highlighted by the Secretary General in a number of his reports on reprisals, by the UN High Commissioner and by several Special Procedures. This escalation of violations in this case speaks to the need for the Council to strengthen its response to reprisals.

ISHR calls on the Council to:

- Ensure regular monitoring and reporting of violations, including reprisals, faced by women defenders through the work of its mechanisms
- Ensure accountability for violations against women defenders by sustained, high level follow up of cases.

Thank you Mr President.